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Author's Note: It's been a couple years since I posted anything and while you shouldn't expect any more stories from me, I will admit writing again was kinda nice. This story is definitely romance free. I'd probably categorize this as Drama/Friendship with Harry and Hermione as the two characters of note, but then I'd just get complaints about the lack of Harry/Hermione in my story if I called it that.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE LIKELY LAD

Hermione Granger was not a happy witch.

This was her second time working for the Ministry of Magic and she'd only been with the Unspeakables for two weeks before politics reared its ugly head. The rumors of the Unspeakables' independence from the rest of the Ministry were not quite as true as she'd hoped. There was a kernel of truth to it, but any situation involving wizards and witches was always susceptible to corruption. So when word came down from the Minister's office that she had better find Harry Potter or else, she knew she couldn't completely ignore it.

Her expectations were low while she spent a couple days researching aliases Harry might be using in the wizarding world. After finding nothing, she turned to the muggle world and spent another three fruitless days searching for him.

Truthfully, she halfway expected to find him in the muggle world. But after turning up nothing useful and reporting that to the Minister's undersecretary, she found out that the "or else" meant "or else you're fired."

Hermione contemplated just leaving but knew how limited her occupational prospects were. More than once she wondered if she should just forget about the wizarding world, move back in with her parents, and go to a muggle university. But even if she were capable of that, it still presented a whole slew of new problems.

So she asked for another chance and they obliged like they'd planned all along. She now had the weekend to find Harry Potter or she shouldn't bother coming in Monday morning.

No, Hermione Granger was not a happy witch at all.

She sat down at the kitchen table in the apartment she shared with her best friend, Ginny Weasley. As soon as she did, Crookshanks jumped up into her lap and demanded some attention. She absentmindedly petted the finicky half-kneazle and let her thoughts drift back to when she counted Harry Potter as one of her closest friends.

She recalled the end of her third year, when they rescued Sirius and Buckbeak. Thinking of his face, Hermione realized that was probably the happiest she'd ever seen him. Discovering he had a godfather, appointed by his parents to care for him, love him, and give him a home. Tragically, he couldn't live with him, but just knowing he was out there and that he had family beyond the Dursleys definitely had an effect on him. Fourth year with the Triwizard Tournament was a procession of clusterfucks culminating in a reborn Dark Lord. Seeing his supposed best friend Ron Weasley turn on him out of petty jealousy likely planted the first seed.

Hermione frowned and realized that at least in fourth year he only had to defend himself from public opinion and a couple of attempts on his life. Fifth year was more of the same only this time the Dark Lord and the Ministry were doing their best to tear him down too. Without question though, the most significant event was the death of Sirius Black. That wasn't just the straw that broke the camel's back, it was the anvil.

She was 23 now, and still Hermione can't even imagine what he must have been feeling. To see the closest thing to family shot down in front of him, knowing it was at least partly his fault for not listening to Hermione. Add in being unable to bury or mourn him properly and it was a recipe for emotional and mental disaster. She remembered hearing people talk about Sirius Black as the Dark Lord's right hand man, and it cut her to the quick. He was an innocent man, dammit! He fought and died for the light, deserving honor in death. It incensed her every time someone who just didn't know the truth would repeat whatever the Daily Prophet had claimed that day about Black.

She still remembered how cold and detached Harry had been when they met up on the Hogwarts Express before sixth year. Zacharias Smith was arguing that Sirius Black was worse and had done more damage than anyone but the Dark Lord. She'd flinched and felt her blood boil, as tears pooled in her eyes. But one look at Harry and her heart broke. He hadn't even blinked. He hadn't been remotely bothered. He literally didn't care.

Hermione sighed. Yes, the death of Sirius Black was almost certainly the moment that Harry Potter gave up on the wizarding world.

He went through the motions of his last two years. Hermione recalled he was frequently meeting in supposed secret with the Headmaster, though she knew he wasn't always meeting him. Sometimes he just said that to get away from them. They had a few rows, and sure enough Ron and Harry had more than a few. She remembered how sorry she felt for Harry and felt guilty remembering how his indifference turned her sorrow into anger towards him. Part of that anger, she'd reluctantly admit was born from jealousy. While he was indifferent towards everyone, he was far from indifferent towards his studies.

Hermione had always known Harry Potter was going to be more powerful than her, but with hard work, practice, and focused study she felt she could keep up with him in most things. In sixth year though, it was like he just stopped pretending he was an average wizard. She still remembered the transfiguration lesson where McGonagall called him out for not paying attention to the lecture on animate to inanimate variations. Harry made a lazy wave of his wand without a word or change from his unconcerned expression and turned the slug on the desk in front of Ron into a perfect replica of the Sword of Gryffindor. McGonagall had to sit down when she realized the rubies were real. After that particular incident, Hermione couldn't remember a professor ever calling on Harry again.

It wasn't until she was on the Hogwarts Express at the end of their sixth year that she realized she'd not even talked to Harry since before their exams. Twenty minutes of inquiry later and she'd accepted he wasn't even riding the train. She promised herself then and there that she would make an effort to spend more time with Harry. Be a better friend to him whether he liked it or not.

It was not a promise she kept.

Stuck at the Burrow, she remembered the face Dumbledore made when she'd ask when Harry was coming. It was the same face Snape made when anyone mentioned Harry.

Further attempts at discussion with the Headmaster made it clear that he was not happy with Harry but was unable to even tell anyone where he was.

It all happened so sudden. Screams and shouts woke everyone up at 2 A.M. Bill and Fleur disappeared out the floo. Molly and Arthur instructed Ron, Ginny and her to all stay there, watch the floo, and keep their eyes out for patroni as they may be needed to relay information. Then they initiated lockdown on the Burrow's wards and disappeared out the floo looking horribly terrified.

In actuality it was only a bit over seven minutes, but it felt like a lifetime with the oppressive silence and thick tension in the air. Then suddenly a bloodied Fred erupted from the floo, stepping forward confidently. He was pressing the remains of a bandage against the back of his head and smiling brilliantly. He pulled the bandage back to look at the blossoming blood stain and announced, "He did it."

Ginny's eyes widened and gasped, "What?"

Fred's grin got impossibly brighter. "Harry iced Voldemort. It's over."

"No way!" Ron shouted.

"How?" Hermione squeaked.

Fred was shaking his head. "Most bloody amazing thing I've ever seen." Fred summoned a butterbeer from the kitchen and saw they were all staring at him impatiently.

"Get on with it!" Ron snapped.

Fred just chuckled. "Alright so, Harry and Voldemort are just going at it right there in Diagon Alley, not far from our shop even. Everything they throw at each other is easily countered, shielded, or dodged. Bloody apparating, like ten times in five seconds. Both of them were

occasionally apparating completely silently, other times even throwing the sound to fake a landing. Then Harry disappeared once but two of him reappeared. Voldemort just negligently dispelled the illusory Harry, before disappearing and then three of him reappeared surrounding Harry." Fred snickered and sipped his butterbeer. "Harry was apparently planning on that and the real Voldemort had no chance to block the strange glowing golden rope like thing. The rope smacked into his left leg, wrapped around it, and shocked the fucking shit out of him. Like I think I saw his skeleton outlined by glowing electrified flesh." Fred explained with a bright grin and his arms extended and twitching. "Voldemort shattered the spell then, but you could see the dark burnt red of where the rope got him. And his leg spasmed every once in a while. Harry and Voldemort traded a few more spells, all blocked or countered, when Harry suddenly slipped his wand back to its holster, and raised his arms like a puppeteer. He was floating up in the air and I heard him take a deep breath. I couldn't see it, but I'm told his eyes were glowing. I could only see the look of absolute horror on Voldemort's face."

Ginny couldn't contain her cackle of glee.

Fred nodded. "Then Harry just windmills his arms into this thunderous clap, and these two giant slabs of some shiny metal appear on either side of Voldemort and slam together sealing him in a solid prison. Thing is, Voldemort had just started to try disappearing so his top half was clearly separated from his bottom half in the freaky metal sculpture wrapped around him. Harry just starts chanting something and his wand snaps back into his hand. The Voldie-prison floats up in the air, slowly rotating in front of Harry as this white hot dragon like thing erupts from his wand and starts to burn the sculpture. Fiendfyre, I think someone was saying but I'm not so sure about that. Whatever it was, it burnt every piece of that sculpture and Dark Lord into ash, except for a single phoenix feather that apparently came from his wand." Fred seemed to sag in bliss. "I mean bloody fucking hell."

Not once did Ginny, Hermione, or Ron think to ask if Harry was alright.

And that was it. The Dark Lord was dead and there was no denying who deserved all the credit. Hermione was a bit perturbed to be feeling less than completely joyous. Though it did brighten her day

when she saw how irked the Headmaster was. Bill and Fleur were married the next weekend and they clearly were full to the brim with joy. Harry didn't show up but he did send a gift that sent almost all the Veela into a tizzy as it was apparently a priceless lost relic of their heritage.

Harry never came by and owls couldn't reach him. Hermione didn't even see him on the Express nor at the opening feast. She feared he might not be coming back at all when she spotted him the next morning at breakfast nibbling on some bacon while reading a book. But like all of last year, he was rather rude and dismissive. Every attempt at conversation was something he didn't want to talk about. And when Draco Malfoy started mocking and laughing at her, she just snapped "Fine," and walked away.

Hermione continued to watch Harry, desperate for any sign that he would welcome her friendship. But the few times she tried were dismissed, and rudely at that. It took her longer than she'd care to admit, but Hermione finally caught on to the fact that Harry had made some sort of modified notice-me-not ward, that only excluded certain people. From what she could tell, Hermione thought it may just be all the professors and staff plus herself and Luna. No one else seemed to ever pay attention to the larger than life Dark Lord slayer in their midst. Given the Headmaster's strained grimaces, she thought maybe Harry was warding him off too but he was able to overpower the ward.

Then one day she came down to the breakfast and the Headmaster was positively exuberant. He even looked fifty years younger. Not once did he ever glance at Harry, nor approach Harry, but the strained grimaces were gone too.

Next thing she knew the NEWTS had arrived. Not for a moment did Hermione feel like she was in a competition with Harry. She figured he'd probably set the bar on the ones he wanted to, but even if he didn't, it wouldn't matter. Hermione Granger found it surprisingly easy to accept the fact the she would never match the sort of connection, gift, or power over magic that a Harry Potter could command.

It was two days after they finished their NEWTS that some refer to as the day the magic died.

Several examiners and members of the educational board came to Hogwarts because they graded the NEWTS and there was a problem with Harry Potter's. Specifically, he didn't have any. The thing about the NEWTS is that they are a magically binding mark. You cannot claim a NEWT as its very existence can be read in your magic. It is tied and bound to your name. Only Harry Potter had no connection to any NEWTS. But in the official books, where the official, impenetrable records exist, it shows someone named 'Son of a Muggleborn' scored the highest NEWT of the year in Runes. 'Son of a Muggleborn' also set the new mark for highest recorded scores ever in both Charms and Defense Against the Dark Arts.

They were insisting that Harry change them back to his proper name and that he tell them how he did it.

Harry refused.

They pointed out that he'd never be a fully qualified wizard without his NEWTS.

Harry pointed out that was not the concern of test administrators.

They left just as upset as they had arrived.

A few hours later at lunch, Minister Scrimgeour came to Hogwarts with a couple of bodyguards and the chairman of the educational board. He was relatively calm and respectful with Harry but no one was prepared for what Harry said when the Minister asked what he was doing, refusing to become a fully qualified wizard.

"I've decided to exercise my right as muggle-raised to leave the wizarding world."

The Minister literally sputtered before getting a hold of himself and clarifying Harry's request. As a muggle-raised unqualified wizard, he could request to sever all ties with the wizarding world. The Ministry would snap his wand and obliviate all knowledge of the wizarding world from his mind. And depending on circumstances, bind his magic.

The immediate acceptance and profound sadness from the Headmaster made it clear he knew this was coming. It was a crushing blow to just about everyone in the wizarding world. The

idea that their savior, the Boy-Who-Lived, Vanquisher of Voldemort, a young man skilled enough to set new records in two of the core magical disciplines would just abandon them so completely. To not want to remember them, to not want to even know magic exists... it was absurd.

But that was exactly what happened.

People resisted, the Ministry resisted, but Harry was adamant. They refused to destroy his wand, instead confiscating it for the Ministry to put on display at some point in the distant future. And just like that he was gone. Five years ago this past June was the last time Harry Potter had anything to do with the wizarding world.

Hermione sighed. And now she had to figure out where he was. She really didn't want to lose her job, but she also would rather not bother Harry. Naturally, she was rather conflicted then on whether she hoped she'd be able to find him or not.

It was these mopey ruminations that her flatmate arrived home to interrupt.

"Hermione," Ginny whined. "I told you to just tell them you can't find Harry and that you tried."

"I did," Hermione replied. "And they said find him this weekend or don't come in Monday."

Ginny winced. "Bugger."

"You still angry at him?"

"Angry?" Ginny repeated with an arched eyebrow. "Well, yes, I suppose I was angry but it was never with him. I was angry at the situation not Harry. Now though, I just kinda hope he's happy, you know?"

"Yeah," Hermione agreed. "I do."

Ginny's eyes lit up. "I say we try to find him."

Hermione did her best to copy Ginny's arched eyebrow.

"Maybe we can find him, talk to him and find out then whether you want to turn his scrumptious arse over to the Ministry."

Hermione considered the suggestion and shrugged in acquiescence. It wasn't as if she had something better to do this weekend. "I'm inclined to believe he's living in the muggle world. Unfortunately, if he is, he's not using the name Harry Potter, James Evans, or any combination of those names. And when you consider his wealth, buying a completely new identity is easily within his ability."

Ginny pursed her lips but nodded. "And I'm guessing you already tried owls and house elves?"

"Owls have been tracked but never locate him and I don't think there's a house elf in existence who would ever betray Harry Potter," Hermione finished with a shiver.

"You know who we should be asking for help, right?" Ginny smugly reminded.

Hermione grumbled softly. "I knew you were going to bring her into this."

Recognizing the tacit approval, Ginny moved over to the fireplace and stuck her head in for a floo call. Not two seconds later, Luna smoothly exited their floo and exclaimed, "Hermione! I hear you have a quest for us."

A whispered prayer of "Merlin, give me strength," and Hermione was ready. She smiled, "Yes, Luna, we need to locate an old classmate or I'll lose my job."

"Ooo!" Luna squealed. "With such high stakes, we're certain to find adventure!"

"They're even higher than you realize," Hermione grinned, getting into the spirit of things. "Because our prey on this hunt is... Harry Potter."

Luna's look of childlike wonder and excitement disappeared in a blink of an eye. "Bugger."

"What's the matter?" Ginny argued. "Afraid we're not up to the challenge?"

Luna frowned in confusion. "He's Harry Potter."

Hermione nodded. "Believe me, we know. Now, we figure he's probably living under an assumed name in the muggle wor-"

Luna's loud burst of laughter interrupted Hermione's briefing. She saw Hermione's narrowed eyes and laughed some more. "Harry Potter? In the muggle world?"

Ginny was measuring up her blonde friend. "Is there something you know that we don't?"

Luna nodded solemnly, "I suspect there are a great many things that I know and you don't."

"You know what I mean!"

"I do," Luna agreed and cheerfully added, "And you don't."

Hermione took joy were she could find it and in this case that was found in the darkening color of frustration on Ginny's face.

Feeling mad with power, Luna thought her friends may have had enough for now and told them earnestly, "I'm well aware that Harry could get along just fine in the muggle world. I just mean, Harry Potter, living in the muggle world? Unlikely." Luna shook her head. "No, I've never seen anyone with such a strong connection to magic. Harry would be a shell of himself if he lived in the muggle world."

"I know!" Hermione agreed in exasperation. "It's why it makes no sense that he'd leave the wizarding world!"

Luna reeled back and looked at Hermione and then Ginny. "Are you serious?"

Hermione and Ginny were both staring back at Luna, quite clearly serious.

"You really don't get why he left?"

"You do?" Ginny snapped.

Luna tilted her head to the side in consideration. "I don't exactly agree with him, but I do kind of understand."

"Please," Hermione pleaded.

Luna sighed and nodded. "You know how there are some wizards out there who think muggles are not worth their notice, they don't place any value on their life, and would much rather never have to ever see or deal with muggles?"

Ginny was scrutinizing the blonde. "Harry's not like that."

Luna shook her head. "No, he's not. But that is pretty much how he views wizards. The way those wizards look at the muggle world is rather similar to the way Harry looks at the wizarding world."

Hermione slumped in her chair, knowing as soon as Luna said it aloud that it was true.

"Oh, not you," Luna assured her when she saw Hermione's reaction. "He likes us, there's plenty of individuals okily-dokily in his books. It's just wizards and witches in general, and pretty much all of the wizarding world's society, government, and lifestyle."

Hermione frowned. "But..."

"Hermione," Luna patiently explained. "There is so much more magic in the world than the small sliver that falls under the jurisdiction of the 'wizarding' world."

Ginny smirked. "You think he might be hanging out in some Mermen village?"

Luna grinned back. "Maybe! I know the Banshees would love him, and the Naga too, come to think of it. Or maybe he's indulging in a hedonistic life as the plaything of a Veela colony." She tried not to giggle at the faces Ginny and Hermione made. "It's the blessing and curse of the strong. The mere presence of someone like Albus Dumbledore, or Voldemort, or Harry is like a warm crackling fire on a cold winter night to our magical senses. Many other magical species

like Veela or Banshees are much more in tune to their magical senses and thus would value his presence even more."

"Do you think they'd keep his presence a secret?" Hermione inquired.

Luna shrugged. "Depends on who he's hanging out with. And that's the problem with Harry Potter. He's Harry Potter. And he's hiding. We'll never find Harry if he doesn't want to be found."

"Bugger," Ginny summarized.

"I know," Luna sighed. "And I was so looking forward to a quest."

Hermione slumped forward onto her crossed arms on the kitchen table. "I find myself rather ambivalent towards keeping my job, but definitely sad at not knowing how Harry's doing."

Ginny crossed her arms and mirrored Hermione's pose. "You think he's happy?"

Luna pulled up a chair and copied the other two girls, resting her chin in the crook of her crossed arms. "I'm not sure what makes you happy is what makes him happy, but I bet he's doing what makes him happy."

Hermione found herself smiling. "You could have just said yes."

"I didn't?" Luna questioned.

Ginny sighed. "Still, it'd be nice to know."

Luna nodded. She waited a beat before adding, "I suppose we could just ask him."

In perfect synchronization, Ginny and Hermione both sat up quickly and shouted, "What?"

"If we wanted to know if he's happy," Luna clarified. "We could just ask him."

Hermione still looked unsettled but Ginny was somber. "Luna, that's the problem we don't know where he is or how to find him."

Luna mimicked Ginny's somber pose. "I know. The fact that he's Harry Potter means that if he doesn't want to be found then we'll never find him."

Ginny huffed softly to herself.

"Luna," Hermione said while shrewdly examining the young woman. "Why did you suggest that we ask Harry if he's happy?"

Luna thought the question odd but answered, "Because you both expressed a desire to know if he was happy?"

Ginny rolled her eyes while Hermione took a breath in and then let it out. "I mean, why did you suggest we ask him if you knew we'd never find him?"

"Oh," Luna said in sudden understanding. "Oh, well, while I have no idea where he is or how to find him, I just meant we could call him."

"Luna!" Ginny snapped.

"He's Harry Potter," Luna explained. "I'm fairly certain he'll answer."

Hermione latched onto the slippery trail of Lovegood-ian thought. "You have his number and can ring him up?"

"You mean like a muggle celly?" Luna questioned.

Hermione chose not to correct her and just nodded.

"No," Luna admitted. "Sorry."

This time Hermione deflated and it was Ginny's turn to press for information. "What did you mean then when you said we could call him?"

"You do know he's the guardian to the borders of the Forgotten Lands, don't you?"

Given the looks on Hermione and Ginny's faces, they apparently did not know.

"What?" Ginny blurted.

"The Forgotten Lands are real!" Hermione retorted.

"What?" Ginny repeated.

Luna paused, somewhat fearful she might be betraying some sort of confidence she may have had and not realized.

"What?" Ginny tried one more time.

"The Forgotten Lands," Luna explained. "You know where the High Elves disappeared to and all of the ancient races like the Fae. The shadowed realms of spiritual awakening, the endless fields that time forgot. Some say the path to Avalon is through there."

Ginny took a deep breath and tried to compose all her thoughts. She paused to consider the best way to word things and said, "What?"

Hermione had heard plenty of stories of other magical races and species, and certainly the Ministry did seem overly concerned with what appeared to be a somewhat small population. And of course there were people who she respected greatly who spoke of such things without an ounce of doubt. She ignored any and all skepticism she may have had and asked, "What exactly does being the guardian to the borders entail?"

Luna shook her head, "The real specifics aren't for me to know and even if I did, I wouldn't be talking. The assumed answer though is that there should be two guardians. One on each side of the border and both of them have full access and control to both sides. No one from over there can come here without passing through Harry, and vice versa."

Ginny had calmed significantly. "That's kinda cool."

Hermione shook her head. "Even I know you do not just explore or dabble in the magics of Forgotten Lands. So how does this help us?"

"Oh!" Luna exclaimed. "If he is the guardian then he has to respond to certain types of magic on this side. We just do a fairy call and he should answer."

"A fairy call," Hermione repeated. "And you know how to do this."

Luna's eyes were undeniably twinkling. "It should be fairly easy to do."

Hermione actually flinched while Ginny just groaned.

Luna just cackled as she jumped up from her seat. "Come on, this will be easiest in the bathroom."

Hermione conjured a mental image of their bathtub filled with blood and shivered.

"I do believe the muggles were using fairy calls well before anyone in the wizarding world knew how," Luna explained. She lay her wand down on the sink and looked at herself in the mirror. Ginny and Hermione were standing right behind her, looking over her shoulder at the reflection of all three of them.

Luna looked in their reflection's eyes and added, "You may want to stand off to the side."

Hermione and Ginny had an involuntary race to see who could most quickly respond to Luna's suggestion as they jumped away, leaving Luna alone in front of the mirror. She took a deep breath and stared into her own eyes, calling out "Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter."

Luna frowned and looked over her shoulder in confusion. "Hmph."

Ginny was watching on anxiously while Hermione appeared to want to bury her face into her palm.

"Maybe I did it wrong," Luna admitted and steeled herself to try again. "Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James POTERRR!" She finished in a shout and held the last sound, drawing it out as long as

she could. Another look over her shoulder showed the same thing as the reflection and that was a distinct lack of Harry. "Bugger."

"Bugger," Ginny agreed.

"Luna," Hermione practically begged. "Harry is not the Candyman-"

"I love that picture!" Luna squealed. "And yes, that was based on a true story of fairy calling!"

Hermione bit her tongue and knew without a doubt that if she insisted it was Hollywood fiction then inevitably she would be proven horribly wrong. So she just said, "Maybe I should try."

"Yes!" Luna agreed. "Harry likes you and would definitely answer your call."

Hermione was feeling a bit skeptical but took Luna's place in front of the mirror as Luna scurried over to the side by Ginny. She looked into the mirror and said, "Harry James Pot-"

"Stop!" Luna shrieked. "Stop! Hermione, no!"

Hermione jumped away from the mirror and nearly fell into the tub. "What? What is it?"

Luna frowned. "You were picturing Candyman." Luna shivered. "Don't. Just... don't. You need to picture Harry when you say his name."

For a moment, Hermione felt like the butt of one of Luna's jokes until she realized she had been picturing Candyman. She just nodded at Luna. "Anything else I should know?"

Luna's face became pinched. "I'll stop you if I think of anything."

Ginny didn't appear terribly comforted by that.

Hermione retook the spot directly in front of the mirror and pictured her former best friend. "Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter."

Hermione definitely felt something happening there, but whatever it was, it fizzled before it banged. A glance over her shoulder revealed nothing.

Luna was nibbling on her bottom lip. "It was definitely working there for the first three, but then it all just fell apart." Luna's look of childlike wonder and excitement reappeared. "I've got it!"

Luna pushed Hermione to the side, and stepped right in front of the mirror. She stared back at herself grinning the grin of victory. "Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Harry James Potter... Son of a Muggleborn... Harry James Potter."

Ginny and Hermione both felt the magic happening this time as there was a small cloud of haze from which a transparent form coalesced into existence and wrapped the blonde in a hug before she knew what was happening.

"Luna!" Harry exclaimed in a manner all too similar to Luna's childlike wonder.

Luna squealed excitedly and writhed her way around into hugging Harry back.

"It's been far too long," Harry insisted, happily holding onto the blonde. He only then turned his head and saw the other two young women staring at him in astonishment. "Hermione! Ginny!"

Harry saw they weren't quite all there and lifted up his left arm towards them, "You want in on this hug?"

They both did and Luna quickly found herself getting smothered and shepherded out of the group hug by the other two girls. Luna accepted the other girls need to reconnect with their friend and let them hug it out.

Until it seemed to be lasting longer than necessary, at which point Luna forcibly separated them to their amusement.

Harry looked down and saw the grime covering the front of his robes had spread all over everyone during the hug. He made a tsk-tsk sound and snapped his fingers thrice. "Sorry about that, I was working on my boat when you called."

With each successive snap, a different girl's clothes were cleaned and freshened.

Now that pleasantries had been exchanged there was a terribly awkward tension in the air as if no one knew how to deal with the others.

Luna saw Ginny and Hermione were both looking conflicted and tried to break the ice. "Did you say you have a boat?"

Harry grinned brightly as he wiped his hands down his robes, cleaning and pressing them as he went. "I do. The Lily," he named it. "I've been building her myself for over a year now."

Luna grinned back. "Sounds like a pretty impressive boat."

"Some might call her a ship," Harry admitted. "But she's almost all magical." He could tell they didn't quite get it or care and moved on. "So what can I do for you? Why'd you call me? And why are those two staring like Ron when he discovered cheesecake for the first time?"

"Oi!" Ginny snapped out of it. "Well excuse me for not knowing quite how to deal with you being a git, running away, and then reappearing all... bubbly."

Luna winced while Harry narrowed his eyes. He began rubbing his ear before he snapped his fingers and Ginny disappeared.

"I'm sorry," Harry admitted to the others. "That kind of attitude is precisely why I want as little to do with the wizarding world as possible."

Hermione found it surprisingly easy to trust Harry and just asked, "What did you do to her?"

Harry shrugged, "Instilled in her a desire to not bother me again and sent her asleep to her bed." Harry glanced around the cramped bathroom. "Where are we anyways?"

"Oh this is my place! Well, Ginny's and mine," Hermione exclaimed as she backed out and offered the twenty second tour.

Harry made a shushing noise that seemed to deaden all ambient noise before replying in a normal voice, "Then I probably just sent her down the hall."

Sure enough, the brief tour peeked into Ginny's room and saw her snoring peacefully, the covers entwined beneath her pajama covered legs.

Hermione was trying to process this and looked at Harry curiously. "How'd you know the blue flannel were her favorite pajamas?"

"I didn't," Harry said with an indulgent smile. "Ginny's magic did."

The answer, in retrospect, seemed both obvious and impossible to Hermione.

The short tour ended with the three former schoolmates sitting back at the kitchen table. Hermione was somewhat surreally mixing up a jug of lemonade.

Harry gratefully accepted the glass and took a large sip. "Thank you Hermione, this is delicious."

The awkward tension began to increase before Harry again asked, "So why am I here?"

Luna was mock frowning. "You know, don't you?"

Harry grinned. "I have a pretty good idea, but it'd still be nice to hear it."

Hermione looked at Luna who seemed to take that as her cue as she explained, "Hermione's gonna lose her job if she doesn't find Harry Potter and bring him to the Ministry."

Hermione winced at the bluntness and hurried to explain, "We'd decided we did want to find you, but I hadn't decided whether I was going to tell the Ministry if I found you."

"And," Harry prodded.

"And of course having seen you now," Hermione assured, "I won't be doing anything without your tacit approval."

"And," Harry urged again.

Hermione paused and came up with nothing appropriate. "And what?"

"And," Harry said pointedly, looking at Luna this time.

"And," Luna reminded, "you wanted to know if Harry was happy."

"See," Harry grinned. "That wasn't so hard."

Hermione couldn't help but be reminded of her best years at Hogwarts and felt a warm smile blossom on her face. "So, are you?"

Harry laughed. "You want the short answer or the long one?"

Hermione just gave him a look that took Harry back several years.

"Right, right, of course," Harry snickered. "Short and then long. Well, the short answer is yes, I am happy."

"And the long?"

Harry sighed in contentment. "The long? Well, the long is more an explanation that I am happy with my successes and frustrated by my failures, so while I'm not always happy, I am definitely productive and more often than not doing well. It just depends on the day whether I could say I'm happy."

Luna grinned as brightly as Harry. "And what about the other thing?"

"The Ministry," Harry said with clear disgust. "This may take a little thought. Do you have any plans tomorrow?"

Hermione shook her head, unwilling to influence Harry's actions in any way.

"How about this," Harry offered. "I have a couple things I have to do with Luna as I was meaning to track her down pretty soon anyways. But tomorrow morning, I'll come get you. We'll do breakfast, lunch,

dinner, all day. You and me, catching up, taking care of the Ministry issues, whatever. Sound good?"

Hermione was trying to think through any possible problems or scenarios when Harry interrupted her. "Relax Hermione, I fully expect you to use the time from now til tomorrow morning to carefully organize and categorize all the questions you want to ask me, most likely starting with the important stuff first in case it starts to be a bit much. One rule," Harry grinned and insisted, "While you can write down the lists, you may not bring them with at all."

Hermione accepted the challenge with a grin. "Fine."

"Actually," Harry added, "You may even want to bring a camera with. Muggle or magical will work. Just a suggestion. Now, if you'll excuse me," Harry turned to Luna who was waiting patiently.

Harry took a deep breath and said, "Do you want some gum? There are some people I want you to meet."

Luna's response was to grin like a loon and start clapping, urging Harry to hurry up with the gum.

Harry held his hand out to Luna offering up a small cream-colored pebble that she snatched right up and began to chew. Harry popped a second pebble into his mouth and started to chew his up too. He turned to Hermione, "See you tomorrow morning, 8 o'clock. We'll start with breakfast."

Hermione could only nod dumbly as she watched first Luna and then Harry slowly de-age and shrink until they were quite possibly the cutest little four year olds she'd ever seen. Luna had grabbed Harry's hand and was dragging him away.

"Come on!" she shouted. And the impossibly young and adorable Harry Potter just smiled at her as he began to lose solidity. Just like his arrival, there was a small haze that he stepped right into, disappearing completely and pulling Luna through with him.

And once again, Hermione was all alone left with the certainty that there was a great deal she still didn't know about magic and about Harry Potter.

Ten minutes til eight, Hermione had her magical camera, she had a muggle camera, and she had three lists she was going over and memorizing again. She'd been shocked to see Ginny still sleeping peacefully thirteen hours later, but it was clear she was getting healthy restful sleep based on her snores and crumpled pillows and sheets.

Hermione almost jumped when she heard her name whispered in her ear. She spun around looking for Harry and discovered a very quiet knocking at the front door. She saw it was Harry through the peephole and opened the door. "How'd you do that?"

"Hello to you too," Harry replied obviously more amused at the 'same old' Hermione than upset. "You ready?"

Hermione crossed her arms. "You didn't answer my question."

Harry mimicked her body positioning and countered. "You didn't answer mine either, but at least I said hello."

Hermione snorted and hurried back to the kitchen. She stuffed both cameras into the magical side of her handbag, which she was most insistent was not a purse. She pulled the door shut behind her and followed Harry down the stairs. "I take it you didn't want to run into Ginny?"

Harry nodded. "The magic on her will work better if she doesn't see me."

Hermione figured as much. She kept stride with Harry as they walked down her street. "Where are we going?"

Harry smirked at her. "You have a lot of questions I assume?"

Hermione nodded.

"And you probably want the freedom to shout at me if needed and to speak freely."

Hermione nodded a smidgen faster.

"Figured," Harry admitted. "I know a great deli, we can get some takeout and eat it back at my place."

"Your place, huh?"

Harry nodded.

"This isn't some far off mystical plane of incomprehensible magical and historical value?"

"Nope," Harry assured her. "It's right here on plain old earth."

"Would it be impolite if I were to ask where?"

Harry shook his head. "Naw, truthfully, it's not much bigger than your flat. I was just looking for the strongest wards in the world and found this lovely place off the coast of Florida."

Hermione blinked and suddenly realized they were somewhere completely different and she'd never even noticed Harry transporting them. She followed Harry into the loud, busy diner where they waited in line. The menu was surprisingly large and she left it up to Harry, who shouted for "two big breakfast platters to go."

Harry was carrying the large bag with their orders in it and pulled her down a nearby alley. She didn't know when or how he did it but her wand was in his hand, and mock whispered, "Strictly speaking, I'm not allowed to do this. That's why it'll be your wand and your magical signature."

He waved her wand in a series of motions leaving ghosted trails behind. "Now Hermione, don't panic," Harry said calmly. "You won't be able to breathe until we get there, but you won't need to either. It'll just take a couple of minutes."

Hermione was about to argue that she might need to breathe when she felt a rubbery film coalesce all over her body and all tactile sensations became muted. She did her best not to panic and certainly trusted Harry. Even still, when he put his arm on her shoulder, it felt like she was the last shell in a roman candle, as flames of all shapes and sizes were exploding around them, sending the pair of them rocketing straight up through a tunnel of white hot fire.

Steam and haze obscured her vision but she was definitely no longer moving. The smoke was wafted away by Harry who removed the spell from her and she gulped into great lung-fulls of oxygen.

Harry chuckled. "I know it may not feel like it but that spell does feed your body all the oxygen it needs."

Hermione frowned and was giving Harry a dirty look.

"You can go through the motions of breathing, but you'll just be going through the motions for your own peace of mind. It's a lot like Vampires eating human food: no sense of fullness, satisfaction, or benefit to the body but to some it's just a habit that's not worth breaking."

"I think I'd like to hang on to my habit of breathing, thank you very much," Hermione replied before looking around. "Where are we?"

Harry hissed a command into the air and light slowly filled the entryway they were standing in. "My place. I'll give you the proper tour after breakfast, but let's eat first."

The floor brightened with every step they took and Hermione could hear the sound of running water along with the rustles and chirps of birds.

In another of those completely imperceptible changes, the hallway path turned into a paved path and they were emerging into a gorgeous little slice of a forest.

She followed Harry off the paved path, stepping over some moss covered stones and into a small copse of trees in a semi-circle around some patio furniture.

Hermione found herself snickering at how differently Harry did things.

Harry smiled warmly back at her. "I think it's all the time I spent locked in the cupboard growing up but I do so enjoy fresh air and wide open spaces."

Hermione frowned slightly at the reminder of Harry's youth, but wanted to stay cheerful. "I can see why you liked flying so much. Or

would it be more appropriate to say your magic liked flying so much?"

Harry popped open her breakfast container and slid it towards her. "Mind if we just eat from the boxes and use the plasticware they provided?"

"Not at all," Hermione gladly took it and settled herself into the surprisingly comfortable chair.

Harry settled himself the same way and started by nibbling on some bacon. "And yes, most definitely, my magic adores flying, almost as much as I do." Harry grinned back at her and added, "But that's like saying Ron and his magic like food."

Hermione had to bring a napkin to her mouth as she'd started to laugh.

"Or Luna and her magic like sex."

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed. "I'm trying to eat here."

Harry waved her on and dug into his scrambled eggs.

Hermione continued to eat while she examined her surroundings. She knew there were stone walls surrounding them in, but at first glance, it appeared like the darkness of a forest, extending on to the horizon.

"So where are we?" Hermione asked in between bites of hash browns.

"My place," Harry said.

"I know that," Hermione grumbled. "I mean... the nature, the outdoors, I can see a stream bubbling. Where are we or what did you model this after?"

Harry was finishing up his toast and explained, "You know these things are all real, right? The grass, the few trees, the stream.... none of it is illusionary."

Hermione drank the last of her orange juice. "I didn't know that but do now. Anyways, you keep avoiding the real question here, Harry. Come on. Strongest wards you could find. You say these things are all real, and I know there's no way these things could grow like this naturally without more direct sunlight and exposure to the elements."

Harry was wiping his mouth before wadding up the paper napkin and tossed in the middle of his empty box. "Well, I should point out that it's not even 4 AM here, we crossed five time zones. And I suspect you'll be surprised at how much natural light gets in here. Sunrises around the corner are pretty magical."

"Fine," Hermione grumbled as she too crumpled up her napkin and pushed her tray away. "So if you're going to keep dodging the question, then just tell me something else. I'm sure you can guess most of the things I'd like to know."

"Fair enough," Harry agreed. "First, I'll just say that names have power, and while I could give you a name for this place that you'd recognize, I much prefer to think of it and refer to it as my place, reinforcing its identity as my place rather than that other name. Second, let's see, the wards. Yes, these are some of the strongest wards I've ever found. There's one in particular that I'd call probably the most horrifically frightening thing I've ever encountered in my life. It's the reason I had to coat you in that stuff, and burn you straight through the power stone, so that the ward could taste your magic and now ignore you. Overall, they're very different than normal wizard or goblin wards, so it's hard to compare but..." Harry paused, considering the words and shook his head.

"Alright," Harry started again, much to Hermione's amusement. "I'll just tell you, the primary focus for much of my studies over the last few years has been Atlantean magic."

Hermione's interest was skyrocketing. "People can't do those things anymore."

Harry grinned. "And you've just proven you know a lot more about it than probably 99.9% of the wizards in the world."

"Yes, well," Hermione bashfully admitted. "Binns' history was so incredibly boring I decided I needed to learn most of it on my own."

Occasionally, magic from the time of Atlantis comes up or is discussed, but it's of magnitude just not possible anymore."

"Not true," Harry interjected. "Merlin could do a number of things no one since Atlantis could. And actually," this time it was Harry bashfully admitting, "he laid the groundwork for a lot of the things I've been doing."

Hermione suspected that, but to hear it aloud made the tiny little scholar girl in her squeal with joy. "You've had successes?"

Harry just nodded.

"Can I see?"

Harry looked up into the darkness above. "We do have a couple more hours til sunrise here. You wanna see something that will make you feel incredibly insignificant?"

It wasn't just the tiny scholar girl inside her that was squealing this time. "Please!"

"Alright," Harry agreed and stood up. He stared at the paper refuse they had from their breakfast until it transformed itself into a pile of various citrus fruits.

"Is that stuff safe to eat?" Hermione inquired as she unnecessarily brushed herself clean.

"No," Harry insisted. "Not for humans. But the bloody garbage disposals? They can eat it just fine, and they will once they wake up."

Hermione followed Harry, looking over her shoulder for slowly rousing garbage disposals. "Do I want to know?"

Harry smiled. "I just call them that. Did you want to use the bathroom before we go?"

"We're going somewhere?"

Harry nodded. "It's one of the reasons Atlantean magic is so misunderstood. I would recommend hitting the head in case we get caught up. I'm going to."

"Alright," Hermione concurred and went to the door Harry pointed to. Three minutes later, Hermione came back out bemused. "Harry, did you steal that bathroom?"

Harry wouldn't meet her eyes as he slipped into the restroom after her. He was out a minute later and admitted, "It's possible that there's an office building in Miami with one more executive office and private bathroom than they realize. I didn't actually move the bathroom, I just made a doorway to it and removed it from their records."

Harry saw Hermione's mischievous smile and added, "I mean allegedly!"

"Right."

Harry pulled Hermione with him as he went into another door. Once the door closed, Harry put his hand on Hermione's shoulder and snapped his fingers.

Instantly they were in a darkened cabin with more star charts than Hermione had ever seen. "This is the Lily." A wave of Harry's hand and several kerosene lamps lit up. "First, a warming charm," Harry said handing her a necklace. "Next, we need earmuffs," Harry continued handing her a pink ball of fluff. Harry twisted the ball and it split in half. Harry demonstrated how they were slightly magnetized and just stuck together.

"You'll want the pendant to be touching your skin, or else you may get a chill. And don't take off the earmuffs until I tell you." Harry retrieved some sort of scepter like device from a drawer he'd locked and ushered her up the stairs and out onto the ship's helm. "Let's hurry, it's cold out there."

Hermione only now got a good look around and saw they were surrounded by ice, and in fact, the Lily was frozen in the ice, like some abandoned wreck from ages ago. Ridges and ridges of white ice and dark freezing water surrounded them from all sides. "Harry, where are we? And don't say the Lily."

"North Pole," Harry cheerfully told her as he flipped his hood up and stepped out into the bitter cold.

As soon as she stepped outside the wind started whipping her around. She snapped her own hood up and pulled it tight against her head. She was calling out helplessly to Harry who just kept smiling and waving her on. Finally they reached some unidentified and unmarked spot and Harry motioned at her to put on her earmuffs, something she was regretting not doing before now.

She felt them mold over her ears and attach themselves to her skin just as total silence overcame her. Harry smiled at her with his own pink fluffy earmuffs on and he showed her the metal thing he'd been carrying. His hand was gripped around a silver cylinder, while other shades of dark metal, light silver, and rich gold were interwoven in an extremely intricate design. Harry's thumb depressed on something and the bottom of the scepter shot out, extending what was a two foot tall device into a seven foot staff.

He slammed the butt of it into the ground and then grabbed a second silver cylinder with his other hand. With both hands on it he was chanting and channeling magic in a wholly unfamiliar way to Hermione.

Suddenly an arcing nimbus of power exploded from between Harry's hands on the device and there was a forcefield surrounding them, extending under the ice they were standing on. It was like a twelve foot tall clear marble containing just Harry, Hermione, and some ridiculously powerful magical artifact.

Hermione was beginning to wonder if that was it, when in her head, she could hear his voice, "Hermione, for this first time, please trust me. Close your eyes and I'll tell you when to open them."

Hermione nodded, absentmindedly noticing that all of the ice outside the forcefield was breaking up and being driven away by the Atlantean magic of the device. She scooped closer to Harry, held onto his shoulder and closed her eyes.

She could feel the ground and Harry trembling slightly as they were buffeted by powerful winds, but had no idea what was happening. She knew if she were still in school, she very well might have

peeked, too curious for her own good. She briefly wondered at what age she would've been smart enough not to give into that temptation when she heard Harry's voice once more.

"You can open your eyes now," Harry told her. "And take the earmuffs off if you like."

Hermione's eyes opened and she just gasped, too shocked for words. Her legs felt like jelly, and she fell to her knees, leaning forward unable to tear her eyes away from the beauty of the sight. Directly across from her was the moon looking larger and more crisp and vivid than ever before. To her left the sun was a massive ball of light, and the bubble surrounding them was stained brown from her angle, keeping it from blinding her. But it was what was below her that took her breath away.

Earth.

The planet was so blue and green it was unreal. The clouds looked like paint on canvas and she even spotted a satellite in orbit below her. She was in fucking outer space. And despite the distance, never had she felt closer to the planet she realized was home.

"Humbling, isn't it?" Harry said after a long silence. He could tell Hermione wasn't ready to talk. "Pardon the pun, but it really puts things in perspective."

Hermione just shook her head, turning to Harry with tears in her eyes. "Can we just... not talk for a bit?"

Harry nodded in understanding. He twisted a couple of parts and pulled one of the silver cylinders out of the device, taking his hands off it for the first time. He sat himself down Indian style, right next to Hermione and they remained staring off in mutual silence.

Twenty minutes they stayed there without saying a word. Hermione finally felt somewhat composed. "This is... this is really big, isn't it?"

Harry shrugged with a slight nod.

Hermione snorted. "Suddenly the idea of an island city floating in the sky is not near so fantastical."

Harry knew Hermione was still piecing things together and gave her time.

At some point, she recognized what was happening and simply turned to Harry to ask, "What am I missing?"

Harry smiled at her and leaned back to look up into the endless black filled with millions of points of light. "I have a theory."

"I'm listening," Hermione responded.

"It's not one the wizarding world would likely ever accept."

"Color me shocked."

"It's about the origins of magic."

"Really," Hermione said before her brain finally took things through to the logical conclusion. "Really!"

Harry saw the surprise on her face when she guessed his theory. "I haven't found any proof or anything, just an interpretation of all the Atlantis records and myths and stories and fables I can find."

"Really!"

Harry laughed, "And it makes sense to me."

"Really," Hermione said with a sigh.

Harry nodded. "Atlantean magic is way too advanced and in way too specific fields."

"So not time magics?"

"Maybe that too?" Harry shrugged. "I'm not ruling anything out either way, but I do believe that Atlantis was not built by nor the home of native earthlings."

Hearing it aloud still amazed Hermione. She tried it herself, "Aliens."

"Intergalactic travelers," Harry suggested. "Refugees most likely. Maybe from danger, maybe their home was destroyed, dunno."

"And you think they fled to earth?"

"Biological compatibility," Harry justified. "And they brought magic with them. The child of a traveler and a human got a little from Dad and a little from Mum, bada-bing, bada-boom, you get a half-magical mix that starts calling themselves wizards."

Harry gave an indulgent smile. "Every once in a while, the mixed genetics skew strongly towards the traveler's way and there's a 'wizard' of significant power, one who if he knew where to look and what to do would be capable of far more of the traveler's original magic. Things beyond the capability of most all other wizards.

"For example, Merlin's notes point out that certain feats are easier or only possible near leylines of significant power. What he didn't know was that the leylines were built by Atlanteans, artificial power sources intended to mimic the effects at the poles. So something that never quite worked for him, I was able to bring into reality since I knew to try at the North Pole."

Hermione had also been laying back staring up into the vacuum of space, turned over to Harry and asked, "Do you ever feel like you're walking amongst giants?"

Harry gave her a funny look.

"Not giants giants, greatness," Hermione snapped. "Like Churchill, Columbus, Da Vinci, Joan of Arc, giants of history."

"You do realize you mentioned all muggles there."

Hermione blinked in surprise.

Harry had a sardonic grin. "It's because wizards aren't allowed to be involved in muggle affairs. So the only things they accomplish are things that affect wizards, a very small fraction of the people. Thus, not exactly historic greatness."

Hermione frowned. "You really do hate us, don't you?"

Harry brushed a hand through his hair in frustration. "It's not the people as much as it is the society. The culture they cling to, the

hatred and ignorance they perpetuate. Sometimes, I wonder if somehow, someone somewhere managed to curse, jinx, or destroy something unimaginable and because of it the wizarding world is unable to evolve."

"Little bleak, don't you think?"

"A little yeah," Harry reluctantly admitted. "But not necessarily inaccurate. Alright then, how about a case study? Albus Dumbledore. He is undoubtedly a giant of the wizarding world, right?"

Hermione nodded before gasping suddenly.

"Hermione?" Harry sat up in alarm.

Hermione reddened and admitted, "Sorry. I just realized I was feeling like Lavender Brown, desperate for some juicy gossip."

Harry barked out a laugh and relaxed back down. "Poor Won-won."

Hermione flinched at the reminder of the awful pet name.

"Anyways, I'm guessing you don't know that much about all the Headmaster has done to me and for me for the greater good?" Harry saw Hermione shake her head and considered, "How much do you know about the Headmaster's history and youth?"

"Pretend I don't know anything," Hermione said a little too happily.

"Fair enough," Harry began. "Albus Dumbledore had a brother Aberforth and a sister Ariana. Seriously brilliant student, slightly obsessed with the Deathly Hallows. Made a friend in town with whom he practiced and learned lotsa magic. Rumors of a more than friendly relationship remain unconfirmed."

"Uh-huh."

"Anyways, together they envisioned a magical utopia where the powerful rule with kindness and prosperity. All the things they'd do for the greater good.

"As always in these stories we now have some muggle-baiting and attacks and a fight between the two friends turns tragic. They don't

know who fired the curse or who blocked or deflected it, but Ariana Dumbledore was killed in the crossfire.

"The friendship and unconfirmed relationship was broken and they parted ways. The two brothers fractured as Albus blamed himself for what happened and Aberforth blamed Albus even more.

"And here is where the tale takes another dark turn, as it's the former friend who was just as strong and skilled as Albus who pursues darker knowledge, delving into demonology even. He's located and mastered the mythical Elder Wand, one of the three Deathly Hallows that he and Albus were so obsessed with. The unbeatable deathstick carves a swath of destruction, as Albus's former best friend and unconfirmed homosexual lover, Gellert Grindelwald-

"You're shitting me!"

Harry snickered. "If you like this, you won't believe what happens in the Potter years."

"I'm listening."

"So, as you know, Dumbledore defeats Grindelwald, and now he is the master of the Elder Wand. With the unbeatable wand, that no one knows he has, he cultivates an air of invincibility. But the war with Grindelwald is not all that's going on in Albus Dumbledore's life. Just a few years earlier, his duties as the Transfiguration Professor at Hogwarts called for him to deliver an invitation to a young man at an orphanage. A scrawny little eleven year old named Tom Riddle."

"Dun-dun-dun!"

"Even then, before the school year starts he discovers Tom to be capable of wandless controlled magic. He steals things and hurts people, primarily the boys who used to bully him until he learned how to fight the bullies."

"Gah," Hermione said shaking her head. "Voldemort as a firstie. Just seems wrong."

"Yeah, you prolly know the rest of his stuff or can guess it. Riddle's brilliant, clever, evil, and hides it. Dumbledore knows it, can't prove it,

and naturally, does nothing. Riddle graduates, goes off to evil finishing school or whatever, comes back, and now Dumbledore is the Headmaster of Hogwarts. Riddle wants the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. Dumbledore can tell there's something off with Riddle, something darker and malevolent. He of course denies him the job, and in my estimation seals the curse Riddle was putting on the position."

"Oh yeah," Hermione recalled. "That actually makes a lot of sense."

"Anywho, after not getting the DADA job, suddenly Death Eater attacks start up and a new Dark Lord is terrorizing the wizarding world. And all the while at Hogwarts are people like the Marauders, Lily Evans, Severus Snape, and Frank Longbottom. Here's where I start to lose my lunch. Two brilliant Potions' students and best friends, even from before starting at Hogwarts were Lily Evans and Severus Snape."

Hermione's jaw dropped.

"Yes, yes, I must shoulder the burden of the knowledge that Severus Snape was retarded in love with my Mum. See, thing is my dad used to pick on Snivellus all the time, sometimes under the pretense of protecting her from him. Snape was your very stereotypical angst-ridden whiny loner, prime material for Death Eater recruitment. Inevitably, he and Lily get into a fight, he calls her a mudblood and that's it for their friendship. Score one for vicious karma and she runs straight to James Potter, who does the smart thing and grows up. And so now, you can at least have some small idea of what Snape must feel every time he sees me, a James Potter clone with his former best friend's eyes."

"Dammit," Hermione swore, "I don't wanna pity that bastard."

"Don't bother pitying him," Harry insisted. "Especially when you consider that he was a loyal Death Eater when he overheard the prophecy and reported what he could to his Master. This is the reason Voldemort came after me and why the others went after the Longbottoms. Only when Snivellus realized he'd just condemned the closest thing to a friend he'd ever had, he became desperate to save her. Voldemort even offered to let my mum live, something I thought was strange until I discovered it was because Voldemort was going to reward Snape with a plaything."

"As usual when Voldemort is involved, things went tits up, I lived, he died sorta, and Snape suddenly had a change of heart, pleading and begging his case to Dumbledore, forever grief-stricken over the role he played in Lily Evans death."

"Bullshit," Hermione called.

"I know," Harry agreed, "But on the plus side, I think this is where Dumbledore finagled a vow or promise or something outta Snivellus that says he must do all in his power to protect me, as Dumbledore believed only I could ever beat Voldemort."

"So he was trying to save your life?"

"Sometimes, yeah," Harry admitted. "But he had some leeway in his actions because he truly believed that tormenting the public figurehead of the so-called light side was a requirement in his role as a supposed dark agent. My money's on him enjoying picking on me too much triggered pressure from the vow, resulting in all those faces he made and the incredibly voluminous explosions of emotion for such a skilled Occlumens."

Hermione smiled and shook her head, "I doubt that, but I think you enjoy your interpretation, so I won't bother correcting you."

"Thank you," Harry agreed happily. "Anyways, this part's pretty well documented. Prophecy given about the chosen one, Dark Lord attacks the Potters, and sets the prophecy in motion when he was attempting to get around it. Sirius goes to prison, and Dumbledore here really comes into his own. This to me is the hallmark of the Dumbledore legacy. With Snape, he was able to determine the Dark Lord was not fully gone, especially as the big to-do back then was actually just the start of the prophecy. Dumbledore sees the mark on my head and knows exactly what it means. He comes up with a plan for the real final defeat of Voldemort. Of course sacrifices must be made, but this is all for the greater good."

"He is awfully fond of that phrase."

"Don't forget that while you may be imagining the well-being of the many, he's probably imagining the world where he and Grindelwald

rule together peacefully. Anyways, he looks at my scar and decides then and there I must die a martyr."

Hermione sat up. "What?"

"Oh yes," Harry grinned. "This is Dumbledore at his most pure. He knows that I contain a piece of Voldemort's soul in my head."

"What?"

Harry nodded. "Now if he'd taken me to proper healers, they would have recognized the taint and worked out a way to get it out of me. So naturally, his plan calls for ensuring no one from the wizarding world can contact me or ever find out just what's so special about the legendary curse scar. Because he knows, left untreated it'll just become more ingrained as a part of me." Harry barked out a sad laugh. "His words to me were literally, 'I knew I was condemning you to ten dark and difficult years,' which tells you just about everything you need to know about him."

Hermione frowned.

Harry spelled it out clearer. "He actively chose for me to grow up unwanted, unloved, because his greater good called for it. I even got him to admit that he never contacted Sirius in prison because he feared finding out the truth and losing control of me. He may be able to insist he didn't know Sirius was innocent, but he made it a point not to know for that very reason. He needed me beaten and abused so that I would see the wizarding world as my salvation and be willing to die for it, taking the chunk of Voldemort's soul with me as by now it was way too entwined with my own for it to ever be separated and not kill me."

Hermione was still frowning.

"I can see you're skeptical," Harry said. "And I haven't exactly been trying to hide my bias, but by all means, investigate these events and make up your own mind. Anyways, you know what happened during our school years, Voldemort, Voldemort, Sirius, Voldemort, and Voldemort, What you may not have known was second year, and Tom Riddle's diary? That was also a piece of Voldemort's soul. Most of sixth year we were on a treasure hunt for the other pieces of his soul. One of them, a ring, was made from the Resurrection

Stone, one of the three Deathly Hallows. Not sure if that was Voldemort's plan, but of course Albus turned into a retard as soon as a Hallow was involved and managed to get himself cursed."

Hermione's eyes widened. "The glove?"

"Precisely," Harry answered. "His hand was all blackened and nasty, but the curse was temporarily contained. Eventually, the curse would've killed him, so he went back to the drawing board for the greater good. He came up with some sort of mess about how he could save Draco Malfoy, while getting Snape to kill him and further ensure the Dark Lord trusted Snape. He was all set to be another sacrifice for his greater good."

"Of all the plans you had to blow up, you got in the way of that one?"

Harry waved her off. "It's not like I meant to. I just knew anything with both Snape and Malfoy is a party worth crashing. Anyways, this was just before that summer, where Hedwig got killed and I managed to trap the Dark Lord."

"Trap?"

"Oh yes," Harry smirked. "You know the glorious defeat of the Dark Lord that everyone celebrates? That was more than a touch premature."

"He was still around?"

"Yes and no," Harry explained. "I did capture him and burn his body with a variation of Merlin's fire, but I also bound his wraith-like spirit to the feather in his wand, the only piece I knew could survive Merlin's fire. So while everyone else celebrated the defeat of the Dark Lord, I now had him trapped and could locate the rest of his soul much easier."

Hermione felt guilty suddenly, remembering how happy she'd been when the Dark Lord was gone and all along Harry's work was only half done.

"I made some not quite human friends that Dumbledore really didn't want me to make and we had a nice little 'I scratch your back, you scratch mine' deal. They'd get the piece of Voldie's soul out of me,

help me locate the rest, and I'd do my best to protect them from wizards. And that's why, the real end of the Dark Lord wasn't until Halloween of our seventh year."

"So Dumbledore..."

"Was more often a hindrance than a help," Harry argued. "And the worst was seventh year. He had the curse, he knew he was dying and he was desperately trying to turn me into him. He wanted me to lead the wizarding world, to share in his vision for the future, for his greater good. The idea disgusted me so fully that I realized I needed to get away from the wizarding world completely."

"It was in talking to some of my new friends that I recognized an opportunity to make my exit far, far easier. Dumbledore was desperate to turn me into junior him because he was dying. But a little help from my friends and we borrowed an idea from Voldemort. In the middle of the night, we subdued Dumbledore, and sliced off his hand with the curse. I then made him my Wormtail and crafted a silver hand of my magic for him. You may remember the time just before Christmas when the Headmaster acted like he was high on cheering charms? He'd been fighting Voldemort's curse for over year and had accepted his death. I knew saving him would make it a lot easier for me to leave the wizarding world so I did."

"Same glove, no one knew anything had happened," Harry shrugged. "I won't deny I appreciate having a little leverage with him because of it. Plus he finally accepted that his plans and future for me were never going to happen. I wasn't going to die the way he wanted me too, and I wasn't going to live the way he wanted me to. That was probably a tougher battle than a Dark Lord with frequent bouts of insanity."

"Hmm," Hermione admitted feeling rather proud of the way Harry handled that.

"And here's the thing about this case study," Harry explained. "With all the cruel and downright awful shit I went through as part of the Headmaster's plans, the fact is, no one else had a plan to deal with the Dark Lord. No one else had a freaking clue what to do. You gotta realize, if we hadn't found all the soul pieces, then he would inevitably come back. Hell, if he were willing to rely on others, he could streamline the body regaining process rather easily."

"Dumbledore might be a bit too eager to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but no one else was doing anything. And if not for him or me, I'm not sure who would or even could have done anything about Voldemort. Someone would've stood up, I'm sure, but I don't know who. So look at Albus Dumbledore, a giant of the wizarding world, and quite frankly, in a number of ways he is the best example of a wizard."

"No, he's really not," Hermione argued.

"I'm not saying he's the best person," Harry countered, "I'm saying he's the best example of the wizarding world, both the good and the bad, the arrogance, the kindness, the moral superiority, and inevitably, the violent and bloody times."

"So you left?"

Harry sat up and sighed. "So I left. It wasn't a world or a society I wanted any part of and I knew it wouldn't work. At first I pushed you guys away for your own safety and because there was a prophecy that the two manipulative controlling old men ruining my life both had incontrovertible belief in. It didn't matter that I thought it was a crock of shit as long as their belief brought it into reality."

Hermione was now sitting up. "Did you miss us?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Of course I did. But after Voldemort was bound to his feathery prison, I had to do a bit of soul searching myself. And maybe it's that I've never known the love of family or given my all in devotion to some young witch, but I felt like I was doing alright and the idea of forever leaving wizards behind was far more attractive than the idea of apologizing to my former friends. A culture where some of the highest aspirations people have is to be like Albus Dumbledore, or god forbid, me."

Harry frowned. "I felt pretty bad about how I treated you all, especially you and Ginny and Molly. But I knew I wasn't going to be deterred from my path leaving the wizarding world. Ten dark and difficult years as some say allows for the possibility of a lonely existence away from the rest of the world to appear perfectly normal. I spent most of seventh year scavenging for everything I could find

on Atlantis in the restricted section. I'm not sure when things started to make sense for me, but somewhere along the way they did."

"Consider that Atlantis records predate every other magical settlement or accomplishment of noted history. You expect people to believe that just a couple millennia ago, almost every muggle and wizard was certain the earth was flat. While at the same time, ages earlier Atlanteans had developed magics that could leave the planet and travel through space?"

Hermione interrupted, "I'm not saying your theory doesn't make sense but there's just not enough evidence-"

"Hermione," Harry interrupted back. "I wasn't done."

"Sorry."

"No worries, but you want evidence? Alright. Back on the Lily, I managed to recreate a device called Mekyl's Sixth. Which, by the way, I love the name of despite having no idea what it means. But what it does, is detect some aspect of Atlantean magic that I haven't figured out." Harry saw Hermione was about to interrupt and pre-empted her, "Whatever it may be, I do know it works. With it, I've managed to locate hundreds of Atlantean relics, most very nearly untouched in millenia."

Hermione's eyes widened comically.

Harry smirked. "Basically, with three points from different parts of the globe, you can triangulate a general area and then use Mekyl's Sixth to zero in on whatever it is that's triggering detection. Once found, you can make the Sixth exclude it from detection and start on the next. Some things I couldn't get to because they existed beyond my reach, some were simply in overlapped space, which I'm lucky enough to have ways around. Anyways, now the thing is, forget triangulation, every single use of my Mekyl's Sixth now points in the same direction."

"And that is?"

Harry smiled sadly and pointed towards an especially bright star. "Believe it or not, but the nearest recognizable landmark is Sirius, the dog star."

Hermione gulped, immediately grasping the significance of that. Her eyes widened and she looked over at Harry. "The Lily's not just any old boat, is she?"

"I said she's more like a ship and nearly all magical," Harry agreed and remembered the time. "Bugger, we missed the sunrise."

Hermione huffed and swung her arm to the side, as if she were presenting the sun for inspection.

Harry smiled as he slipped the silver cylinder back into the staff. "I meant at my place. All the cheeky little blighters are generally up and stirring with the sun."

Hermione stood up, moved over and hugged Harry from behind. "I find you finally and you're leaving again."

"Sorry 'bout that," Harry offered weakly. "For what it's worth, I never wanted to hurt anyone. I pushed you guys away because as much as it hurt, it probably hurt a lot less than if I hadn't." Harry scratched his chin. "Of course if I hadn't, I'd be prolly be dead, sacrificed for Albus and Gellert's greater good."

"Oh gosh," Hermione said from her place resting on Harry's shoulder. He was steering them down closer and closer to the planet. "You really think those two may have been..."

"In all honesty," Harry admitted, "No. But I'm pretty sure Albus had feelings for him, I just don't think they were returned. And hey, I owe him at least ten dark and difficult years at a minimum. So I'll spread my rumors however I like."

"You are one of a kind, Harry Potter."

Harry grinned, perfectly unconcerned by Hermione hanging onto him. "Alright, it's time to put the earmuffs back on. You can keep your eyes open as it's mainly just steam and clouds with little to no visibility. I just wanted you surprised."

Hermione put her earmuffs on and then went back to hugging Harry from behind, closing her eyes as she rested her head on his shoulder.

The ride back through the atmosphere was as bumpy as the ride up but Hermione paid no attention. As absurd as it seemed to Harry, she actually fell asleep, most likely emotionally drained from the discussion.

Harry decided to cast a strong sleeping spell on her so that she wouldn't wake as he dismantled the scepter, and the frozen arctic air was once again hammering them.

He carried her with him, as he made his way back to the Lily and then transported them both back to his home.

Hermione woke up in an incredibly comfortable bed that smelled strongly of an unknown man. She sat up quickly and recognized she was still wearing the same clothes as before, as in... outer space. "Ugh," Hermione sat back down with a groan.

Taking a few moments to collect herself, she got up and walked out the door, quickly recognizing the bathroom she used earlier and called on again.

She followed the hallway that became a paved path back towards the patio furniture by the trees, only to find it empty and the earlier transfigured pile of citrus fruits gone.

The sounds of birds chirping and splashing drew her attention further down the path and she could hear Harry laughing. She curved past the corner and saw the bubbling stream turn into a larger pool of water, complete with small waterfall.

Harry was seated on the bank, squeezing mud through his toes and laughing. It was the rest of the scene that flabbergasted Hermione. All over the place, resting on ledges, laying on their backs next to Harry, some swimming, some flying, some even doing a backstroke, there were more phoenixes than Hermione would've ever guessed existed in the world.

Harry was laughing at a large brown and red one that had managed to spear a whole grapefruit with his beak. Only now, the bird couldn't open his mouth, so it was honking and flapping his wings to Harry and the other phoenixes' amusement.

Hermione just stared at the scene, unwilling to respond when suddenly there was a flash of flame and a large grapefruit thumped right on her head. "Oi! What the hell?"

Apparently this was about the funniest thing in the world given the reactions by all the phoenixes.

"Hermione! You're awake!" Harry called as he stood up to move over to her. "Wanna see something cool?"

Harry bent down to pick up the grapefruit that had rolled away from her and said, "Watch this." Harry whistled loudly and then threw the grapefruit into the air, up near where the wall met the ceiling sixty feet up.

The most amazing thing was that a giant flock of phoenixes all flew en masse, flaming back and forth ahead of each other, chasing after the grapefruit, while tugging back their fellow birds. One of them finally grabbed the fruit in its mouth, twirling away and trilling a song of victory as it went. Most of the others all pulled back and made their way to other spots, while two of them were unable to stop their momentum and smacked headfirst into the wall.

Both unfortunate birds fell backwards and splashed into the water below.

Now everyone, including Hermione was giggling at the scene. "What the hell is this?"

Harry shook his head in disappointment. "Come on Hermione. I thought for sure you would've figured this one out by now."

Hermione took that as a challenge and was straining to think of any Atlantean rumors or lost ancient magical myths that matched up here.

A cup came streaking around the corner and Harry snagged it like the born seeker he was. He dipped it into the pool and brought it over to Hermione. "Drink this. Maybe it'll help jog your noggin."

Hermione looked at all the phoenixes swimming in the water and looked in the cup skeptically. Oddly enough, the water looked

clearer, crisper, and cleaner than anything fished out of a pool could possibly be.

"It won't hurt you," Harry urged and smiled as she tipped it back to sip.

Hermione took a tentative sip and had to admit that while it seemed like just water, it was probably the best water she'd ever had. She could feel the magic in her responding immediately. She jumped up suddenly as her body was apparently as responsive as her magic. "What the hell is happening?"

"If I were to guess," Harry said with a mischievous grin. "I reckon that's your hymen healing itself."

"What?" Hermione snapped.

Harry dodged the thrown empty cup. "Oh Hermione, what's happened to you? Here's a hint, I'll give fifty to one odds that the ten year old version of you would've figured this one out a long time ago."

She narrowed her eyes and resisted the urge to explore her personal areas for changes. "So this is a place of muggle legend and myth?"

Harry just grinned back. "Here it comes..."

Hermione was frowning before her eyes popped open wide. "Harry!"

Harry snickered as she finally caught on to just about the only legend and myth associated with Florida.

She was actually stomping her foot as she pointed at the waterfall. "You cannot be telling me that is the Fountain of Youth!"

"Are you sure?" Harry questioned. "Because I bet I can."

Hermione sputtered in place and may have stomped her foot a couple more times.

"You want to be careful you don't drink too much more though as it can get complicated," Harry explained. "But a single glass never

messes with memory, it just rolls back a few of the miles." Harry saw she seemed a little bit calmer and added, "In a lot of ways it's just like a super-charged magical colonic."

"Harry!"

Harry didn't even hide his snicker. "In about ten minutes you're prolly gonna wanna be near the bathroom."

"I swear to god I'm going to find a way to get you back for this."

Harry just smiled and nodded to the birds. "Thing is, for phoenixes, it's kinda like a drug."

Hermione looked at Harry oddly.

He was jerking his thumb as two of the birds doing backstrokes swam into each other and started to splash wildly. "These are basically the lazy, stoner phoenixes. Or as you probably guessed, my garbage disposals."

Hermione sighed and was wrapping her arms around her stomach. "You make my brain hurt more than Luna."

Harry smiled brightly. "That's one of the nicest things anyone's ever said to me."

Hermione just rolled her eyes and watched the rather relaxed congregation of occasionally majestic birds.

"Hermione, you know how I mentioned that one of the wards in particular was one of the most horrifically frightening things I'd ever seen? Well, I wasn't just bringing you through the wards that way to key you in, it was also inoculating you."

Harry wasn't even looking at her. "I'm pretty sure it's Atlantean in design, but I was too afraid to mess with it. It'd be better if it was just a deadly ward, but it's not. It destroys the magic in wizards."

Hermione looked at Harry in shock.

"Exactly," Harry mumbled. "Can you imagine if the muggles ever found out that such a thing exists? Truth be told, it's more like a

mutating disease. From what I read, when a wizard crosses the ward, then their magic starts to break down, but the mutating effect on them was contagious to their nearest family. Kinda like how a child's magic is often similar to his parents, the closer the magic identified with another, the more susceptible it was to spreading to them.

"And it's why I think this legend never carried over into the wizarding world. Wizards who sought the fountain returned home muggles, if they returned at all. I don't know about Ponce De-"

Harry was interrupted by low rumbling gurgle and pale look on Hermione's face. He quickly pointed down the path and explained, "Bathroom's that-a-way, don't wait on my...." He trailed off as Hermione seemed to be clenching as she ran.

A far more subdued Hermione returned and found Harry sitting in the grass surrounded by stacks of notes, parchments, books, and scrolls.

"Revenge will be mine," she weakly promised.

Harry laughed, "If you're feeling that drained," Harry snickered at the face Hermione made. "Seriously, have a swim in the water and you'll feel great. Just try not to drink too much."

Hermione grumbled and paced a bit behind Harry, not quite ready to sit down.

Harry tilted his head backwards and looked at Hermione. "Sorry," was all the warning Hermione heard before she was launched through the air and splashed into the water with the grace of a drunken three-legged elephant.

Hermione paddled her way towards the shore until she could stand easily with the water up to her waist. Her wet matted hair covered her face, but the displeasure could be read in her angry trembles. "Potter! That is-"

Whatever it was, Hermione was forcefully interrupted by loud call of "Bork!" and the largest most well-fed phoenix there cannonballed into the water with a splat, angling the splashback just right, to

explode in Hermione's face. The result was hair blasted back and a wide-eyed look of shock.

"Curly," Harry reprimanded while battling his own bout of the giggles. "That was mean."

Curly surfaced in the water halfway between Hermione and Harry, gargled loudly, before diving back under and swimming away.

Hermione and Harry tracked his progress through the crystal clear water until he burst through the surface, flew up and then plopped right into a spot between two other well-fed phoenixes. The two phoenixes on either side tipped over from the force of his landing and grumbled at him.

The shocked pause gave Hermione's mind enough time to realize that her body felt better than she could ever remember. She felt rejuvenated, fit, healthy, and energetic. She just wasn't ready to admit this aloud yet. "Lazy, stoner phoenixes, eh?"

Harry grinned, levitated Hermione quickly, and snapped his fingers, drying her and her clothes in one snap. Seeing an opportunity to keep her mind away from anger, Harry shouted, "Yeah, check this out. Hey Moe!"

A single fwoosh sound indicated travel by fire and one of the previously tipped over well-fed phoenixes appeared right in front of Harry.

He made a strange sound of curiosity and stared at Harry.

Harry stared right back.

He tilted his head and jutted out his chin.

Harry stared right back.

Hermione's eyes were whipping between the two waiting for something to happen.

Another questioning sound from the well-fed bird and Harry stared right back.

Then without warning, the phoenix apparently named Moe, shook his head wildly and shouted, "Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk, nyuk."

Two more fwoosh sounds and to the right of Moe appeared the cannonballing phoenix just a foot off the ground, letting gravity take over the rest of the way so that he landed with a fwump. Just to the left of Moe the other tipped over phoenix appeared, only he was inverted, so when gravity took over he landed on his head with a surprisingly hollow conk sound.

Moe let out an annoyed squawk and reached over, slapping away the feet of the upside down phoenix, while his follow-through continued around Moe and knocked the other phoenix down too.

Curly wasn't too crazy about being knocked down and with a fwoosh of flame reappeared directly above Moe, lifting him up by the feathers on the top of his head. Moe's feet and wings were flailing wildly as Curly slowly lifted him off the ground.

Harry glanced over at Hermione and knew that if Luna gave points, he just earned a buttload. He pointed to the formally inverted phoenix rolling to his feet and unnecessarily added, "That's Larry."

Hermione couldn't tear her eyes away as Larry positioned himself under Moe, prepared to catch him as Curly pulled the other phoenix higher and higher. Naturally, Moe flamed away, and the sudden lack of resistance meant Curly flew right into the rock formations above, a muffled thump and gravity took Curly right down to Larry, ending a small explosion of feathers and a pair of twittering birds.

Moe was rolling around on the ground laughing his plump ass off. He was pounding the ground with a curled wing, and Hermione couldn't help but wonder if the tears he was shedding had different magical powers than normal phoenix tears.

Moe suddenly stopped laughing and sat up, trembling. He looked at the others helplessly and said a single, "nyuk!" before bursting into flame.

"You got him!" Harry shouted startling Hermione. Curly and Larry slapped wings in celebration and waddled over to Moe.

Little birdie Moe squeaked pathetically as he crawled out from his own ashes.

"Moe gets those other two all the time," Harry explained. "It's not often they trigger his transformation."

Hermione watched the other two begin to kick little Moe back and forth and felt the rational side of her brain just grind to halt.

She plopped herself down next to Harry, completely forgetting she was pretending to be furious with him. "This is so fucking absurd."

"Language Hermione," Harry scolded and pointed to Moe the bouncing baby phoenix. "There are children present."

"Oh bite me," Hermione retorted as she lay back on her grass, ignoring the phoenix stooges.

Harry let her be and went back to the notes he was compiling.

Hermione propped herself up slightly on her elbows. "What are you doing?"

"Compiling some information," Harry explained without looking up.

Hermione resisted the urge to huff at the completely unhelpful answer. "I suppose trying to talk you out of this would be an exercise in futility."

Harry nodded before reaching across for a crumpled scroll.

"Well then can you at least give me some assurances that you're going to be able to handle yourself out there?"

Harry paused, hiding the notes he was working on as he brought all the documents into a single stack. "You understand what I mean when I say that real Atlanteans, the intergalactic traveling kind, are different from us?"

"Not exactly," Hermione admitted. "How different?"

Harry shrugged. "Honestly, I think the step from Atlantean to wizard is every bit as significant as the step from wizard to muggle. A lot of

the things wizards can do, no power on earth could enable a muggle to replicate. The magical power necessary just isn't there, even if the human physiology and biology is identical."

Hermione nodded.

"It's a part of why I think a fair amount of the Atlantean magics are impossible. We're like muggles following wand movements in an old charms book with a twig we picked up. It's never gonna happen."

"Not just an issue of magnitude?"

Harry shrugged. "I've thrown frightening volumes of various energies at some things that don't even twitch in response. But even the stuff that works requires power beyond most wizards. You know the engine we used for our jaunt in the sky? I could throw everything in my arsenal at it for years in London, and I doubt it'd even spark. You on the other hand could maneuver and control it over the North Pole, but you'd probably need to augment your power or get help to ignite it."

Hermione looked hopeful.

"Sorry," Harry grinned. "Can't part with it. That's my backup engine number two. The Lily has two primary engines, and two backups. That one still needs a little polish, but it's functional. I've also a completely different style of engine I'm working on. And you know that spell I cast on you that provided your body with oxygen? It's one I designed for exploring new lands or dealing with problems in space."

"You really are going, aren't you?"

Harry nodded with a big smile. "I've already met with the Queen, and with her blessing, have been dealing with the American Secretary of Magic. Both because I don't particularly get along with your Ministry, plus the Yanks have the best space program."

Hermione looked at him impressed.

Harry shrugged. "I'm not sure how much faith either of them has in me, but I made it clear they wouldn't be able to stop me."

"How soon?"

Harry hesitated but admitted, "I'm leaving on the autumnal equinox."

Hermione blinked. "That's less than three weeks away."

Harry nodded. "I know, it's why I'm kinda busy at the moment."

"How have you been preparing?"

"Hermione, I'm not going to go over every little thing-"

"Harry, please," Hermione pleaded. "At least the highlights. I may think of a thing or two you may have missed."

Harry sighed but found that pretty difficult to refute. "Fine, okay, let's see, I've got canned goods to last me a century or so. When the ship is functioning properly, it requires no outside fuel or power source. I've got more technology from the Americans than I fully understand yet, most of it geared towards sending and receiving long distance signals. I've got a storage cabinet with about a million galleons worth of potions that keep well in stasis, a personal library that may possess a startling resemblance to the London Public and Hogwarts Libraries combined-"

"Hang on," Hermione interrupted. "Are you going to be relying on magically enlarged spaces within a spaceship?"

Harry smiled brightly. "Yes and no."

"That's a bad idea."

"I agree, but these aren't the space expansion charms you're thinking of," Harry explained. "The Lily really is my greatest work. It's actually more like multiple matrices of doorways to space that doesn't take up space in reality."

Harry saw his explanation did not soothe Hermione's inquisitive side. "The cabin we first appeared in? With all the star charts? That was a room in space that didn't exist inside the ship. Once we were up on the bridge, we exited that particular room and were back on the proper ship. I can turn the cabin door into a door to my library with a couple of chatty portraits, a door to a magic containment field where

I can practice the dangerous things without fear of it affecting the Lily, or a door to my bedroom, which I still need to get a nice spa or bath for.

"Oh and here's the beauty of it: the matrices? There's no limit to the number of rooms I can add, nor can anything stop me from sealing one up and removing it's connection to this reality. I run into something bad I need to cage? Piece of cake. Locate something too big or too numerous? I got Atlantean infinity on my side."

"Don't get cocky," Hermione scolded. "So who's going with you?"

Harry winced a little before answering, "No one."

Hermione sensed something in the air. "What was that?"

Harry sighed with a smile. "Dobby."

"Oh," Hermione said in understanding.

"He still thinks he's going to convince me to bring him," Harry leaned closer to her and was rubbing his ear. "And to be honest, I think he may just stowaway no matter what I do. I'm still trying to talk him out of it, but part of me doesn't think the fight will be worth it. Plus, I would appreciate his company."

"So why don't you?"

"Because he probably won't survive more than a few years without magic."

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh," Harry agreed. "I've got a handful of portraits, but I wouldn't be surprised if they stop moving at some point. Plus more books, movies, and music than I know what to do with. Not taking too much in the way of living things. Some eggs, seeds, and small plants are in stasis, and I can create an environment capable of a decent sized garden. I'm also thinking about bringing a few serpents with me as low maintenance pets and potential conversationalists."

Hermione knew there was no way to be subtle about this one. "You don't think you'd rather have another person with you?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't think I know anyone else who could do this, let alone that I'd trust enough to do this with. I mean if something happens to the Lily I'm going to have enough trouble saving myself."

Hermione figured she knew the answer to her question but asked anyway. "Are you going to be able to communicate back here?"

Harry slowly nodded, uncertain whether to trust Hermione. "For a while, sort of... well two ways I suppose. First is something I set up for Luna and some friends of mine."

"Guardian of the borders thing?"

Harry shook his head. "Of course she told you. Yes, guarding the borders of the Forgotten Lands. Thing is, guarding the borders takes a significant amount of magic. It requires a certain degree of trust, but it also requires an extraordinary amount of power. Part of the problem was Dumbledore would never have been trusted by them, it's why they came after me pretty early. Thing is, I was able to help them out with the power requirements, and as such the guardian position has changed a bit."

Hermione was smirking. "I can see your mincing your words, but I assure you I don't know nearly enough to piece any of this together."

"Right," Harry grumbled. "Because Hermione Granger would never piece things together from a surprisingly small amount of information. Anyways, I'll just tell you, I made a new leyline and set it up to handle the heavy lifting on the borders. It still requires a trusted person, and Luna was my nominee. What this means is that the little pond behind the Rookery is now about as deep as Hogwarts lake, and there's a merman village down there too."

"You made... a leyline."

Harry nodded. "In essence, it's a fountain of power. In this case, my power, which means I should be able to send things back through it. Notes, books, giant space shark skulls, whatever. It's possible I may go too far for the connection to be maintained, but it's also possible it'll stay open." Harry saw Hermione was biting her tongue. "Spit it out."

"Leylines are manifestations of the magic in the planet! You can't just make a leyline."

Harry snickered. "Feel better?"

"A little."

"Got any more?"

"Not at this moment."

Harry nodded. "Anyways, so that's a way I'll be able to send notes or updates back. But I don't think I'll be able to receive anything."

Hermione frowned. "You said two ways. What's the other way?"

"How much do you know about house elves? And now saying the question aloud I realize how stupid I sound." Harry did his best to ignore Hermione's smug look. "Nevermind. Okay, see thing is, a few years back I helped out this house elf named Gatzby with a vampire problem he had. Cool little dude, but he was old, and bound to the family that I'd kinda just ended.

"Now, I know this next part may come as a shock to you, but it appears that Dobby kinda likes me and isn't shy about telling other elves about me. Hard to believe, I know."

Hermione suspected that may have been an understatement.

"Anyways, Gatzby, crazy little bugger that he is decided his last act on this earth would be to give me a rather precious gift. And well, it'll be easier to show you..." Harry reached up and rubbed his earlobe back and forth as slowly his ear grew larger, paler and then nearly grey as it flopped forward.

Harry just grinned as the sight of him with a house elf's ear left Hermione speechless. "Most of my everyday magic is usually house elf magic." He snapped his fingers and in a blink his ear was back to normal. "Thing is, you know how house elves can invisibly listen in on rooms that they're not actually in? Well, I kinda can too. Not sure if it'll work, but there was no degradation from the far side of the moon so it could last indefinitely."

"So you can hear the earth with the late Gatsby's ear and send messages and packages through the leyline you put in Luna's pond?"

Harry nodded before frowning. "If I didn't know better even I'd admit that sounds a little absurd."

Hermione's understatement meter dinged again. "So why tell me?"

"Because you asked?"

"Right," Hermione echoed from earlier. "Because Harry Potter would never hold anything back when asked a straightforward question."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Your Ministry situation. I'll admit, my first instinct was to head on over there, piss off the Minister and goad him into killing me in a rather public fashion. Faking my death seems the easiest way to ensure no one's looking for me. Sadly, that's a bit unnecessarily petty and childish even for me. So I decided the next best thing would be to steal their best asset from under their nose."

"Best asset?"

Harry smiled. "You're hardly their biggest fan, just limited job prospects and not so limited bills, right?"

Hermione's eyebrows rose. "I suppose..."

"I want to hire you," Harry said. "No pressure or strict time table, but I figure a hundred thousand galleons up front."

"For what?"

"To write the true story of Harry Potter. The wizarding world doesn't understand me but that doesn't mean they never will. You get one published and in bookstores and the goblins will have a million galleons bonus for you."

Hermione was fighting a smile. "I was already considering writing one myself."

"Figures," Harry scoffed. "I'll leave you a few notes and we should plan to have dinner in a couple weeks where you can interrogate me to your heart's content. Luna will be a great help, and well, probably Dumbledore too if you ask the right questions. Think you'd be up for it?"

Hermione nodded firmly.

"Excellent," Harry said as he stood up. "I think I've filled up your brain with too many things too quickly, so how about some dinner and I'll take you home?"

"Yeah, that sounds good." Hermione looked around at all the happily lounging phoenixes and the beauty of the fountain as she slowly got to her feet.

"I'll warn you now, I strongly, strongly, strongly advise you not to seek out the Fountain of Youth. That is a journey fraught with dangers, madness, and perhaps more magic than you're ready to take on by yourself. On the other hand, if you can find a phoenix or maybe get one of these overstuffed turkeys to answer your call, they could safely take you to my place, not the Fountain of Youth. See what I mean? I'll be taking my room down, but leaving the bathroom door. You certainly have my blessing to take advantage of this place, just be careful."

Hermione nodded sadly in understanding. "Food now?"

Harry snorted. "Sure thing, Ron."

"Prat."

Harry led Hermione back to the room they could exit from. "You got a pensieve, by chance?" Harry asked just as he transported them both back to London.

Hermione turned her head, still bothered by how little she felt traveling. "Yeah I do. Why?"

Harry just smiled and led her out of the alley. "Because I noticed you didn't take any pictures today."

Hermione's eyes widened in surprise. "Bugger!"

Hermione pulled the cloak a little tighter around herself as she walked up the path to Hogwarts. She reflected over all the changes in the past few weeks. She quit her job, had a modest nest egg in the bank, and perhaps greatest of all, the world felt a lot more magical. Maybe it wasn't quite the endless possibilities that she'd envisioned as an eleven year old when magic became real for the first time. But after years of disappointment and disillusionment with the wizarding world, things were looking a lot brighter.

Two nights ago, she'd had dinner with Harry Potter for what was most likely the final time. She'd been pleased to hear that Dobby would be accompanying Harry. Apparently, the excitable elf had found an alternate power source strong enough to practically bring the Lily to life. Whatever it was, it allowed Dobby to bind himself to the Lily much in the same way elves can be bound to Hogwarts.

And just like that, it was no longer up to Harry on whether Dobby could come or not.

She sighed unable to think of any wizards or witches capable of the kind of dedication, loyalty, and affection that came so naturally to house elves.

Looking to the sky, Hermione wondered whether Harry was still here or if he'd left yet. Today was the autumnal equinox and she found it curiously convenient that the Headmaster sent a patronus to interrupt her breakfast with a urgent, veiled order to come to Hogwarts as soon as possible.

Fighting the brisk, late September air, she approached the front steps of the castle when the Headmaster came out to greet her. "Miss Granger, thank you for coming."

She pasted a less than sincere smile across her face. "Certainly Headmaster. What can I do for you?"

"There have been an alarming number of robberies last night, including at least two here at Hogwarts."

Hermione knew her innocent face could use some work. "And you think I could help with the investigation?"

Albus grimaced slightly. "The culprit isn't in question as much as locating him is."

Hermione found herself resisting a grin. "Let me guess, you think Harry Potter is the thief."

"Not directly," Albus admitted. "The truth is a note was left at the scene of each crime."

"A note?"

Albus nodded. "They say, 'Thanks for your donation' and all are signed by..." He hesitated but found no help and reluctantly finished, "Space pirate first mate Dobby."

Hermione's resolve crumpled into dust and she laughed out loud in the Headmaster's face. She looked up and saw how unamused he was, only to collapse further into giggles. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she said as she caught her breath.

"Even if I were capable of searching for Mr. Potter, I know it would be an exercise in futility," Albus admitted. "And the house elves have all been extraordinarily unhelpful with regards to either Dobby or Harry."

Hermione's attention was caught as she saw a dozen house elves appear off to the side of the castle. Soft pops were heard as more and more of them appeared, all with their heads tilted back and looking to the sky.

Hermione felt the magic in the air singing in response. Even the Headmaster was spinning around in alarm. She saw centaurs and unicorns emerging from the forest, all moving away from the thick tree lines to get a better view of the sky. Mermen surfaced in the middle of the lake and even the ghosts of Hogwarts floated out onto the grounds.

Suddenly, Hermione felt it too and bit back a gasp. Entranced by the thick magic in the air, she couldn't help but to turn to the sky. The early morning sun was bright but Hermione knew she was looking in the direction of the dog star.

Idly, she heard the Headmaster frantically asking, "What is it, Miss Granger? What do you see?" But she couldn't find it in her to care right now.

This was not a moment to disturb.

She knew tears were streaming down her face but paid them no mind. Her entire being had felt this full and overwhelmed just once before. It was a few weeks ago when she looked down on the planet for the first time.

There are some moments in life, some things, places, or ideas of such profound beauty that words will never suffice. Hermione was having the second one of her life and she desperately hoped it wasn't the last.

She blinked, belatedly realizing the Headmaster was shaking her, when she suddenly had an epiphany. This was not the last such moment Hermione would have. She knew it with every fiber of her being. She may have no other or she may have hundreds more moments but she knew with certainty that she would see Harry again. And that would be a moment.

She turned and finally acknowledged the Headmaster with a look of fulfillment and sadness. "You really have no idea what you just missed, do you?"

The Headmaster stepped back not expecting such a reaction. He was about to question her further when there was a burst of flame that he recognized as phoenix magic. A tied and rolled parchment appeared in the air, waiting for Hermione to reach out and grab it.

She opened the note, angling it so that the Headmaster couldn't see the writing.

Hermione,

One last thing I should mention is that the magic of Atlantis is dangerous and is meant to be earned. You can't just buy a book and give it a shot. You must seek things out and prove yourself worthy of the responsibility of their relics and powers. As you probably guessed, I pilfered an awful lot of the good stuff for myself, but I

have also left an awful lot behind too. Including my own personal research and findings on all the things present and missing.

With this letter, I've included my notes on how to build a Mekyl's Sixth which should be your first move. You can probably locate your first piece of Atlantean treasure on your own, but I suspect your second's going to require Luna's help. Just something to keep in mind.

Not to sound too crazy or anything, but you'll probably always be the voice in my head that scolds me for doing something stupid. Take care of yourself and thanks for everything.

And remember, when adventure calls, well, you know what I'd do.

Harry

P.S. – if you include any of this letter in that book I asked you to work on, then please please please come up with a proper send-off, catchphrase or memorable final line. I spent 45 minutes trying to think of something that wasn't one small step for a wizard, or asking not what your planet can do for you. Then I went schlepping for poetry and finally composed my own haiku that despite excessive profanity I genuinely considered. When I realized I was sincerely considering the haiku (To infinity; And beyond, motherfucker; Where the fuck am I?), I knew it was time to just give it up and leave it to you to find some proper words for the moment.

Hermione couldn't help but to laugh at the post script and surprisingly poignant and crude haiku.

"What is it Miss Granger?" Albus interjected unable to see the letter but seeing her eyes had finished reading.

Hermione's grin slid off her face and she turned back to the Headmaster, considering. She finally admitted, "I'll tell you later."

"Excuse me?"

Hermione shrugged unconcerned and looked back to the sky. "I seriously doubt you'll find the stolen items anywhere on the planet."

"I'm well aware of Mr. Potter's abilities."

Hermione couldn't keep herself from snorting as she turned to look at the Headmaster. "Right."

Albus's patience was at its end. Anyone familiar with his facial expressions would know he was right on the brink of drawing his wand in anger. He insisted, "Is there something you'd like to tell me?"

"Oh yes," Hermione snapped back just as seriously. "But not just yet. Later."

"When?"

Hermione didn't even pretend to hide her derision as she assured, "Not for at least ten dark and difficult years."

"Bugger," Albus grumbled as he deflated and turned back towards the castle. He knew enough now to know he didn't want to answer any of her questions at the moment. "Good day, Miss Granger."

Hermione smiled contently, not ready to move just yet as she continued to stare at the sky. "No Headmaster, it's a great one."

THE END

Author's Note: First I'll say I've never seen the tv show The Likely Lads or its return to tv, "Whatever happened to the Likely Lads?" On the other hand I was listening to Snuff while writing some of this and when I was struggling to find a title the Snuff song "Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads" came on and seemed rather fitting. As for the idea here? Well, truth be told, I was watching the fourth Pirates of the Caribbean movie, really dug the look of the Fountain of Youth and then imagined what kind of Harry would make that place his home. Naturally, one pretty far removed from wizarding society. The rest just spun from there. Indubitably, I will regret turning non-wizardly things into cheesy happy near-utopias and all the semi-ridiculous fantastical names, places, and supposed species. It happens. And yet I'm fine with it as it fit the need for this little ficlet.

Reviews are welcome, encouraged, and greatly appreciated. If all you're going to ask is when I'll write more or if I'll write more, then don't expect a response. The answer is: no plans to and I don't know.

Any other questions or comments requiring response will be happily replied to. Thanks for reading and when adventure calls, well, you know what I'd... wait, where the fuck am I? (Which by the way, is very likely the name of Hermione's Harry Potter biography.)